

20p

KNOW UNIVERSITY

An Alternative Prospect For Prospective Students

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TO ALL A-LEVELLERS INTRODUCTION



UNIVERSITY IS A POWERFUL INSTRUMENT:

IF YOU DO NOT KNOW WHAT TO USE IT FOR
YOU WILL BE USED BY IT & THOSE WHO
BUY ITS PRODUCTS.

IF YOU WANT TO LEARN WHAT YOU
CONSIDER IMPORTANT YOU WILL NEED
TO LEARN * HOW TO SURVIVE IN A
SYSTEM WHICH MAKES YOU DO THINGS
ITS WAY; YOU NEED TO * LEARN
HOW TO LEARN; YOU NEED TO
* CO-OPERATE WITH OTHERS BE-
CAUSE THE OBSTACLES ARE MORE
THAN ONE PERSON CAN OVER-
COME; AND YOU NEED TO
* LEARN WHAT'S WORTH LEARNING

Most people leaving school have no choice about which university or college to go to - and most of those who do, do not choose whether or not to go into higher education: almost everyone feels faced with a narrow range of opportunities: unemployment, a low paid job, the forces; this job, that apprenticeship or training scheme, a college to get further qualifications; and for a very few, this or that polytechnic or university.

If you are choosing which course of higher education to follow, you have the widest choice of all, but the chances are you haven't even considered them.

Do not "take a year off": do what most school leavers are doing - signing on, looking for jobs or training opportunities, starting bands, running Rock Against Racism gigs, hitch-hiking to India, becoming part of the world and learning.

You will still be able to go to university later, still get a grant, and get that much more out of it because you are experienced and know what you are doing.

If you are foolhardy enough to persist in going straight to university after school this pamphlet tries to make up for that lack of experience, to provide a few hints on how to get the most out of it.

What's Worth Learning About...

LEARNING

Information from scientific and social research is growing exponentially; in many fields it is becoming obsolete almost as fast - in a few, much faster. This makes it essential to learn -

- *general principles
- *ways of finding comprehensive up-to-date data
- *ways of organising data to show its context and above all
- *to decide what to learn & how to use it most effectively.

Information is not neutral nor an individual possession but an extension of perception and a powerful social tool.

YOURSELF

You are not an isolated ego, either entirely free to do anything or totally determined; you can decide what to do and do it to the best of your ability as far as circumstances allow; you can join with others to influence or even change those circumstances.

Learn about yourself and your circumstances by working collectively; discussing experiences; keeping a diary; studying people, history, society and the economy; and above all, becoming involved in the world.

the WORLD

Average personal income in the poorest developing countries is only 3% of that in developed countries; that of all developing countries including oil exporters is less than 10% of ours.

Over 1,200 millions of people live in dire poverty. Over 800 millions suffer from diseases which fresh water, adequate sewerage, enough to eat and proper shelter would ease.

Over 460 millions suffer from gross malnutrition; harvest failures mean millions starving to death. Growth in military spending by most countries exceeds their economic growth: what are their governments afraid of??

Even to do nothing is to take sides.

This pamphlet is about creating an alternative society to the one we live now - a society based on caring not cash, on need rather than greed. Many people are already involved in creating alternatives and struggling to change the way we live: join them! the more people actively creating a different future from the one being planned by multi-national corporations and the institutions serving them the greater the chance of it coming about.

Follow up the ideas by talking with people, joining an existing project or starting your own, reading alternative and radical magazines, getting Ways and Means Directory of Alternative Information, £1 from the National Union of Students, or contacting the Student Community Action Resource Project (SCARP).

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Typed by Sue, Bernice & Titus; written & produced by Titus with help from Brighton and Hove Community Resource Centre and other friends.

Based on the experiences of ideas in education for Sussex (ie Sussex).



T/SOL/5/6/20

I. A PLACE OF LEARNING OR-

In contrast to any respectable textbook, University prospectuses do not even attempt to say what their assumptions are or mention the context in which that work: this prospectus challenges you to find that out, and ask yourself why the university really wants to have you. This first section tries to give a few polemical clues about the real role of universities in society.

The activity of people at university is deceptive: reading, writing, lectures, seminars - surely they must be learning?? And at the end of it all, can't they talk much better, explain things clearer, quote facts or make calculations?? Sometimes - just as clever monkeys can perform better after intensive training, but basically graduates do not know what they are talking about unless they have taken a special interest in a subject and stepped back from studying to understand it.

The origin and development of universities suggest that learning is an incidental rather than central purpose: as craft guilds for scholastic vocations they were more concerned with book-learning and devising arguments to defend received Truths than even checking the truth of their books, even more concerned with their monopoly over preaching and teaching than either of these, and most concerned of all about social status. Since then these priesthoods have been superseded by the civil service, for which universities were reformed last century, and science, our modern theology in which facts replace biblical citation and experiments are a form of witness.

It is difficult to describe universities' contempt for the learning process to someone who has not experienced it, but it should be apparent from their prospectuses, which are more concerned with selling an image than making an honest invitation to learning; it continues in their courses, which do not start from what you are actually doing and thinking, or even what is being done and thought in society at large, but take you along preset tracks. The greatest potential benefit of study - learning how to learn at an advanced level - is usually ignored, so that students are left to develop their skills incidentally by trial and error or let themselves be spoon-fed by course notes and booklists, leaving learning out altogether.

This is compounded by a total disregard for the way in which knowledge and information is used in society, which eventually leads most graduates to expect every problem to have a clear-cut solution (if only the right books or formulae could be found) and all they need do is set the argument out logically and everything will fall into place. What's more, the content of most courses is also irrelevant to the kind of work for which they supposedly qualify you, so that the only practical qualification is the skill of passing exams.

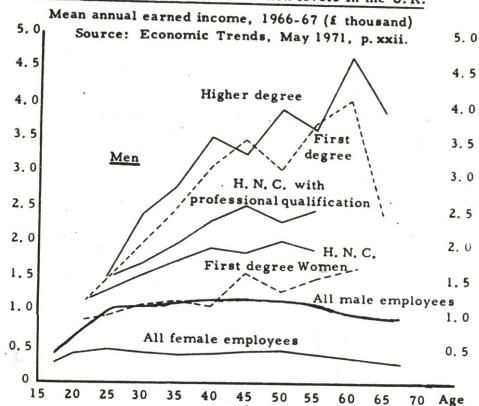
Most books and apparent knowledge produced in these circumstances are glosses on other books or new words for old theories, and the fact that very occasionally some genuinely new and important knowledge is produced in universities is no more remarkable than the discovery of genetics in a monastery or relativity and the foundations of quantum theory in a patents office: time, commitment and access to the appropriate resource is obviously much more important than the institution; if anything, university swamps learning by squandering these on futile tasks.

If universities are not much concerned "to advance learning and knowledge by teaching and research" to quote the Charter of Sussex University as an example, then its other objective "to enable students to obtain the advantages of university education" may be more important.

These advantages can be seen in the verbal or numerical fluency acquired by graduates, in the assumption of superiority that comes from seeing so many of their contemporaries pushed out of education on lower rungs of the ladder, in the common social values implicit in rhetoric without action and above all in the social status conferred by the degree. This status is justification for the university's elaborate classification system, the mumbo-jumbo of graduation ceremonies with gowns and mortar boards, the hypocrisy with which lecturers prostitute their subjects for finals examinations - and the reason why most students put up with it without thinking.

The clearest connection between education and social position is the relationship between income and educational qualification: fig. 1 shows that as a degree holder not only will your average starting income be higher than for someone without a degree, but that it climbs steeply throughout your working life if you are a man (women, as in the rest of education and work, consistently get a worse deal). A degree is therefore not an indication of skill but a ticket to an entirely different social world, in which income rises steadily with age: in short, the middle class gravy train.

Figure 1.
Age earnings profiles for education levels in the U.K.

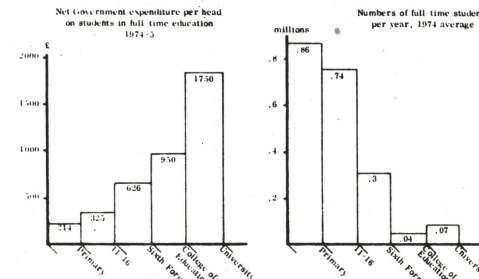


Another way of looking at education, favoured by some economists, is as an investment: according to them, the personal costs and earnings forgone by going to university produce an annual rate of return roughly equivalent to 13% on the degree for life (i.e. if you had worked and invested your earnings instead of going to university). By contrast, the state's return on your education, in terms of taxes raised on a graduate's higher income, is only about 6%.

These two paragraphs show that if you play the university game, you personally could do very much better than your contemporaries - and at their expense!

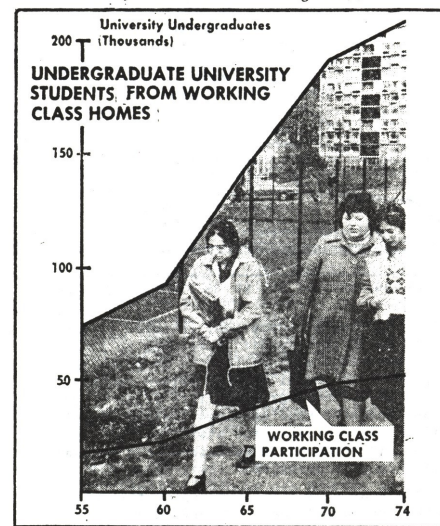
A PATH TO PRIVILEGE?

As a British university student, you will benefit from the best provided and most privileged public education system in the world: once you are finished, many times more money will have been spent on you than the average school leaver finishing at the same time (fig. 2):

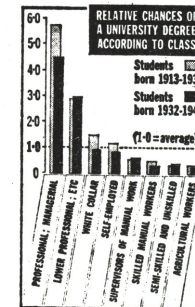


Altogether, about nine times as much is spent on a university student per year than on a primary school pupil: buildings, staff student ratios, equipment, etc. are all much worse at primary level even though shortages of resources mean that people are leaving school without being able to read or participate fully in society.

This imbalance in spending cannot be neutral or accidental, because the richer resources of university are mostly used by men from the richer classes in society: for over thirty years the proportion of students from working class families has hardly changed, and has never been more than a quarter, while the proportion of middle-class students has increased rapidly (see fig. 3), and only a third of all students are women - the lowest proportion in Europe apart from Holland (with 23%). (THES, 20.1.78: 1973-4 figures).



As with spending on education, the numbers of students from professional and managerial backgrounds is in inverse proportion to their share of the population:



These gross material advantages of going to university are never mentioned in prospectuses, but there is a silent assumption that they will be given fairly and impartially - like the finals examination results - to each student according to merit. All the university does is ask you to submit to its rules, courses and finals examinations for these opportunities to be yours.

However, the degree only gives you an advantage in the rat race and for many people all they experience is the race and a constant dissatisfaction as the implied promise of university education remains unobtainable: graduate jobs are in short supply and competition is fierce.

But worst of all are the ways of thinking and acting engendered by university life which insidiously become part of you, even if you are consciously opposed to them. The paradox is that because university appears to leave you almost entirely free to think, speak and act as you wish, the apparent potency of language seems so much greater than mere action in the world and your reality begins to consist of words and concepts, or, at most, symbolic acts. Hence in fact you abandon the world, including yourself, to others or impersonal processes.

Therefore, unless you make a conscious decision to develop yourself on a broad front - intellectual, social political, physical, etc. - the university will take over your time, effectively deciding what you are to become.

What's Worth Learning

The Social Arithmetic of Education

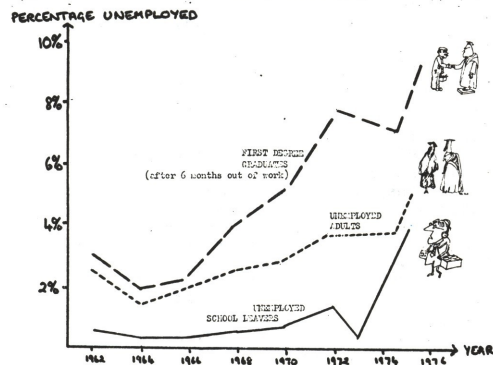
Fig. 2 shows that the total education spent on someone leaving university in 1975 was £9736 (at constant prices) whereas the amount spent on someone leaving school at 16 (as the majority do) was only £3234.

Does this mean:

- 1) One university graduate = three school leavers? []
- 2) University for the few is more important than primary school for the many? []
- 3) "Equal opportunity" means the better you do the more you deserve? []
- 4) There is a systematic bias in the whole structure? []

UNIVERSITY IS NOT QUITE THE AUTOMATIC PATH TO PRIVILEGE IT USED TO BE:

*Graduate unemployment six months after graduation is double the national average, most of whom are probably average graduates with average results who are simply squeezed out of the market by oversupply:



*As a result, graduates take jobs for which their study is irrelevant - English Literature majors copy writing for publishers, historians as information officers for big bureaucracies, economists as trainee tax inspectors.

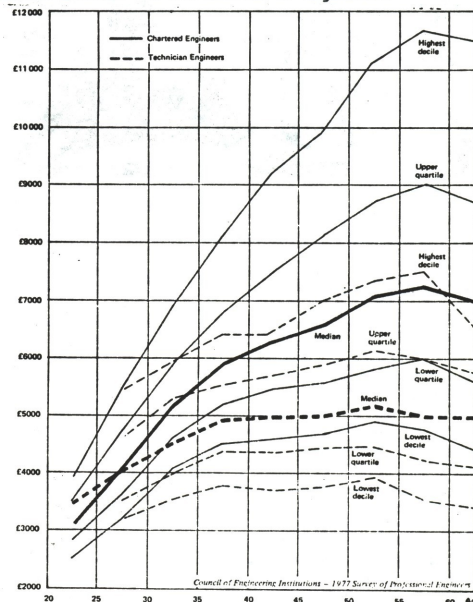
*Instead of the personal or financial rewards they were lead to expect, graduates are often left with a profound dissatisfaction. They have little power to improve their lot, except to keep changing jobs in the hope that one turns up which at least pays well: how much better it would have been to experience work first, then decide what you wanted to learn, and then do so by the most appropriate means - training course, college, university, crash course, Open University, apprenticeship.

*Even the salary which used to guarantee graduate privilege is now a liability because pay policy has kept its level steady, public expenditure cuts have made upward mobility difficult and increased the amount of work while the absence of overtime pay means working longer hours for nothing. For example, since 1965/6 the real average industrial earnings index has risen about 20% more than the real median income of Chartered Engineers.

However, one recent change that has enabled graduate workers to improve their pay, if not job satisfaction, is unionisation and industrial action on one level and professionalisation on the other.

*In many fields, even where graduates are in high demand, jobs are becoming increasingly narrow and specialized: the administrator becomes a functionary, carrying out orders from above, the scientist almost a technician, working on small isolated experiments while only the management sees the whole.

*Thus the division which once existed between ordinary workers and the graduate elite is now moving up the educational ladder, creating a new elite - better qualified and members of an appropriate professional organisation. For example, at one time Chartered Engineers had degrees while Technician Engineers had HNCs; now more stringent conditions are being introduced so that the majority of engineering graduates will become Technicians - the skilled white collar workers of a technological society. The pay difference between Chartered and Technical Engineers is not simply a differential amount, but the rate at which it rises (or does not) with age: for one class, the majority, it levels out while it continues to rise for the elite (see graph) And for those who point out that Chartered Engineers rise into increasingly responsible managerial posts - spot the crap - Exactly! Why should the opportunities for greater responsibilities and promotion be so different between the two classes of engineers?



What's Worth Learning

The content of engineering courses becomes obsolete quickly - replaced by more accurate data or more effective techniques: over 30% is obsolete after five years, over 60% after fifteen.

*How much of your course is already obsolete?

Modern technology can put a man on the moon or connect every policeman and soldier to a single command headquarters, yet most of it is irrelevant to the world's major problems.

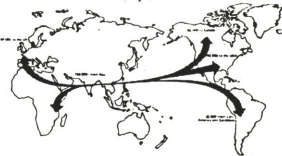
*How can these questions become part of your learning?

TECHNOLOGY

98% of the world's technological research and development is located in the developed world - leaving just 2% for 70% of the world's people.

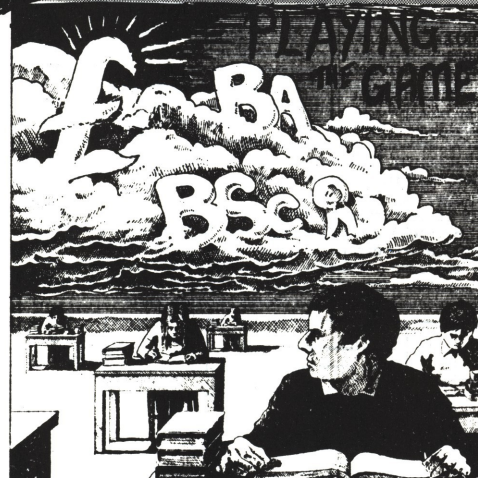
The Third World spends billions buying technology (as patents, licences, consultants etc) from the West, much of it inappropriate, much of it military technology or with expensive strings attached.

A flow of know-how from the poor south to the rich north



From the early 1960's to 1972, 300,000 trained and skilled people migrated from developing to developed countries, worth over £100 billion to the West, more than the total aid given in the same period.

THE SURVIVAL KIT



What ever anyone says, a university's main product is degrees and its business examinations, so you should begin to make up your mind right from the start whether you want letters after your name or whether you want to learn what is most appropriate for you. Ask yourself honestly why you want a paper qualification, remembering that two A-levels are already more than most people have and will at least secure you a place on the Executive Register in the dole queue; if you don't know what you want, three years of University could be an expensive ticket to nowhere, as many post-graduates, teachers and faculty (if they are honest) will admit.

No exceptional abilities are required to get exceptional marks once you have been admitted to the degree factory: use a down-to-earth study aid, such as Derek Rowntree's *Learn How to Study* (and avoid Tony Buzan's woolly mystifications). Ruthlessly separate work for exams from academic frills. Choose your courses by method of assessment and find out exactly how much weight is given to what before you even look at the syllabus; avoid courses for which the assessment stretches over a long period of time, such as continuous assessment or long dissertations, unless you are good at bluffing; do no more than is needed to do well in the exam, and start revising for the final exam before you begin to study; do not become personally involved in the subject unless you are able to limit your involvement to the exam requirements; avoid subjects you are personally interested in because they will detract from the rest of your course; balance courses of technical or factual knowledge (however irrelevant) with general ones (however wishy-washy) and choose tutors who will spoon-feed you for the exam rather than play guessing games or indulge in speculation; exploit tutors for their basic knowledge and genuine enthusiasm; dismiss those who are pedantic, opinionated, wishy-washy, have not read everything on their booklists, are

easily diverted to other topics, follow their own hobby horses rather than the syllabus, are work-shy or ignore the final examinations; in the final year, practice exam techniques go through past papers for recurrent questions.

Working like this will free your time for more worthwhile things and give you the stamp of respectability for comparatively little effort: that's what being part of the establishment is all about. The student who learns to play the game will be much admired, with ample time to pursue outside interests and still come on top with a choice of jobs while other graduates go on the dole. Your success will be the envy of others, your career will become a personal interest of people in authority, some of whom you respect and admire from a distance or know only by reputations, you will be offered jobs while others are fighting for them; and the temptation will be crushing.

The basic flaw in this strategy are that you will become, and even make yourself, into something wanted by senior managers (whether in academia, the civil service, arts world, industry or whatever) and almost cease to be something for yourself; for you to succeed, others must fail and learn the necessary humility to serve your success; the better everyone plays the game, the sharper the competition and more meaningless the outcome; and the chances are, someone else will have a slight advantage through family connections, leaving you among the many second-rated despite their apparent talents. Survival tactics in a competitive society are ultimately self-defeating, because survival of the most competitive individuals means the disintegration of society: nothing new is discovered but old half truths repeated with more polish; great achievements, usually the product of co-operation (whether guided by collective effort or co-ercion) are squandered in competition and the social cohesion that makes co-operation possible is lost in the isolation of individuals.

Many students accept the game because they know no other, if they feel something is lacking from their lives, or something is wrong, they usually think something is wrong with them and go to the student counsellor or keep "their" problems to themselves; a few come to the conclusion that something is wrong with the "system" or "society" and join a political group as a means to change, but hardly anyone stops playing the game for fear of losing what little advantage it gives them. A paralysis sets in when it comes to their own lives - personal problems seem to deep, society appears entrenched, they are powerless to do anything - except perhaps write about it or take symbolic actions.

All this is part of the illusion, the academic paradox in which the experience of university study, its isolation and impotence to affect anything except your own badge of status obscures the privilege in which you find yourself and the relative power over resources which you now possess.

Crap Detecting

Working as a group wont, of itself, solve many problems unless it also enables you to act - and the very beginning of effective action often comes from detecting crap in what goes on around you, whether in conversation, tutorial, lecture, students union or wherever: get people to say what they mean in plain words, in terms of their own lives and don't be afraid to say you don't know the facts or don't understand: you will soon discover that very few people in higher education know what they're talking about. If people are boring, irrelevant, or talking above your head, tell them how you feel, make them sensitive to what is going on and recognise changes in you; stop them or walk out if they talk too much or treat you as anything less than adult.



This is particularly important in tutorials, seminars, and lectures: don't be intimidated-ignorance is your right! Turn the socratic method on tutors, find out what they know, why they know it, how they came to know it, what good it is to them or anybody, and above all, whose knowledge it is.

Do not let tutors get away with asking for their essay instead of yours, or handing out a title which corresponds to their idea of intellectual development but has nothing to do with the reality of yours, when tutors return your essay with only a few perfunctory remarks, a number or nothing at all, hand it back saying "This is not good enough", do not write another essay until you are satisfied they have read and understood it - ask them detailed questions about its content and style, even if you know it to be mediocre: they ought to be capable of telling you precisely why so that you can learn from it (the most common reason for mediocre essay is a mediocre or irrelevant title). When you do write something worthwhile and the tutor responds copiously, do not let it finish with a good report but re-write it until you are fully satisfied it communicates effectively, because an essay is only a 'try'. Tutors must not think students can be marked but not read.

A finished essay ceases to be a 'try' and should be published: if it is worth putting into words it should be worth reading; unless it is published (even only as a duplicated sheet) you will never learn what

EXAMS



Exams and other forms of assessment measure many things apart from intellectual ability:

- working class children's low chance of getting to university makes the degree a test of social background;

- they test a person's stamina and organisational ability;

- systematic differences between arts and science results suggest that they also test the subject one is taking;

- different results for examiners marking the same paper mean that the examiner not the student is being tested;

"All the experimental data [shows that] assessment by different examiners produces marks with considerable variability such that ... the part played by the examiner can be greater than that of the performance of the examinee." H. Pieron, *Universities Quarterly*, 1967, p. 300.

- handwriting and presentation considerably affect exam results;

Examination results do not even have any predictive value of either academic or other achievement.

Most condemning of all, once an exam paper - and thus a person - has been marked, the result remains for life while the evidence is destroyed and cannot ever be challenged, contrary to all principles of tutural justice and scientific method.

Marked for Life, B. Butterworth & A. Powell, NUS, 1972.

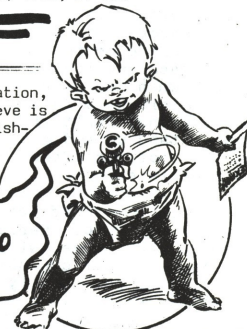
'Reliability and Validity of Examinations', in *The World Year Book of Education*, 1979, ed. J.A.Lauwerys & D.G. Scanlon, by Roy Cox, pp70-78.

'The Relationship between College Grades and Adult Achievement' by D.P.Hoyt, in *ACI Research report* No.7, Sept. 1965, Iowa.

'Degree Class and Attainment in Scientific Research', in *Brit. J. of Psychology*, 51, 1960, 67-73.

writing is about - communication, otherwise all you will achieve is unreadable errudition. Publishing articles for others in your subject is a good task for a student subject group a way of learning new skills and, if you also arrange meetings to discuss duplicated articles, a touch-stone for the relevance of what you write.

WE'RE STARTING A COUNTER-COURSE!!



COURSE CRITICISM



When you detect crap - flush it out: if you are uneasy about a course, the way it's taught or its content, don't take it like an obedient A-level student and silently do your best to make up for the tutor's deficiencies. Talk with others about it and if they feel the same, discuss it with the tutor directly, as a group, holding up the tutorial or lecture if necessary. If you find the lecture room or tutor's study intimidating or if it inhibits free discussion, suggest you meet on more neutral ground, hiring another room if necessary; if the tutor doesn't want to come, put it to a vote and let the majority decide - if he or she stays put, too bad.

Attempt to change the course by meeting outside the tutorial or lecture to criticise it systematically: the lecturer's attitude - is it patronising, condescending, sexist or racist; the way information is presented - too rigid, too rapid or too slow, too much to take in, or too little to be useful; what are the unspoken assumptions behind the course; is the course content biased or irrelevant for your purposes.

Instead of doing essays or problem sheets, write up your criticisms: send them to the tutor for his or her comments; if you object to his or her assumptions, analyse them, look for alternative assumptions, analyse them and write them up, for yourselves, other students and the tutor.

You could produce a critical sources guide on alternative approaches to the subject for all students on the course - an annotated list of books criticising orthodox texts and outlining alternative perspectives could be the first step to escaping from an academic blind alley.

Some lecturers cannot be budged, their minds already have rigor mortis - "you can't study such and such until you've done this" they say, "everything will fit into place later on ... it's all very well for you to criticise but I know best ... anyway we've always done it this way" - in other words, take it or leave it. Call their bluff - ask them straight if that's the option - and leave the course!

Start your own student seminar, work out what you want to learn and how you want to work; get critical sources guides, films, video or outside speakers as appropriate; produce leaflets and posters explaining your objections to the course and advertising your alternative programme, hand them out to other students and faculty, involve them in what you are doing: if your course tutor or lecturer is left without students while you are all busy studying elsewhere in your own way, then he or she's obviously not up to much.

Another tactic for making courses more responsive to student needs is an end of term report for every tutor or lecturer: say what you wanted out of the course; what the tutor offered; his attitude to students, knowledgability, presentation of information; the quality of course assignments and his responses to work done, special interests, etc. Send a copy to the tutor and the students union, who should keep them to help other students make a better choice of tutor.

Another way of bringing home the sterility and timeless ignorance of many courses is to organise an essay bank and lecture note library, making complete sets of notes or essays available to other students. This exploits the fact that lecturers hand out the same essay titles, marking them without taking in what is written, and deliver the same lecture year after year. Faculty who fear these tactics have only their teaching to question. Cynics, freeloaders and other players of the good-degree game may well latch on to these as even easier ways of making the grade, thus heightening the contradictions between education and learnings.

The ultimate form of course criticism is an alternative prospectus, a consumer's guide to the degree factory: if your university or Department does not have one, then it will depend on the efforts of people like you to produce it!

Together with essay banks, tutor reports, critical sources guides, etc., alternative prospectuses are all ways of passing ordinary students' experiences to new students or people thinking of going to university.

Counter Course edited by Trevor Bateman, Penguin Education: a collection of critical articles on subjects from English Literature to Chemistry.

Social Work and the Welfare State, A Critical Reading Guide, 20p from NUS: annotated alternative booklist from social administration etc., through housing, medicine and psychology to education.

Ecology Critical Reading Guide, 50p from NUS: brief, pointed articles and sources on major topics.

Psychology Critical Reading Guide, also available from NUS.

Women's Studies in the UK lists women's study courses, £1 from Margherita Rendel, 71 Clifton Hill, London NW8 0JN. Further information from WIREs, Women's Research and Resource Centre at 27 Clerkenwell Close, London EC1 0AT (01-253 7568).

Guides to other subjects still need to be produced - contact SCARP, the Student Community Action Resource Project: 1st Floor, Bombay House, 59 Whitworth St., Manchester, tel: 061-236 4058, or Oxford House, Derbyshire St., London E2, tel: 01-739 4568.



It's our education after all!!

What's Worth Learning LITERATURE

In 1975, over 50,000 British undergraduates studied languages, literature or pure arts subjects, at a recurrent cost of about £9 million, compared with £1 million allocated to a programme of volunteer tutors for the approximately two million adults needing help with reading and writing.

Over a third of the world's population are functionally illiterate and barely have an opportunity to learn to read and write their own language.

Why doesn't reading Shakespeare, Coethe, Flaubert, Joyce, at public expense stick in your throat - because of their "humane values and profound insights into human nature"? because you wouldn't study them at the end of a day's work? or because you don't know any better?



I see nothing.

Counter Course

IDEAS INTO ACTION



But if crap-detecting, course criticism, alternative seminars, etc., do not create the kind of learning you want from university, you can still use its resources to organise the kind of courses that will.

A counter course should be about alternative ways of learning as well as learning different things: the following passages are adapted from counter courses run by students at Sussex University -

"We started from our experiences and the world in which we live rather than an academic syllabus, we wanted to develop our ability to direct our own learning, individually and collectively, and to learn about the world by changing it in some way rather than merely interpreting it.

The course was organised to encourage maximum participation and opportunities for everyone, from the most shy and reticent to the most adventurous. Its main components were regular meetings of everyone on the counter course, an initial period of "de-schooling", a joint weekend of activities, and a project.

We started with a large meeting with a steering group who had booked the rooms, organised the introductory sessions and produced a loose-leaf folder of more detailed information about the course.

People then divided into ad hoc groups for "de-schooling" - like de-briefing or the consciousness raising groups of the women's movement, this involved talking over one's experience of education to help people get to know each other better, to become more confident at speaking in groups and learn how to give others a chance to speak, to develop a greater understanding of our own learning processes: our experiences have educated us far more than we have been taught, what we have learnt is not always what we want or need to know, and above all, our experience of schooling has trained us to be dependent on teachers for our learning. Before we can even think of consciously determining our own learning, it is therefore necessary to discover what we have unconsciously learnt.

The weekend workshop started on a Friday evening with reports back from the "de-schooling" groups and a discussion, followed by games which loosened the atmosphere and brought people into physical contact with each

other. The next day we discussed video tapes of lectures or tutorials in the morning, crystallising our objections to conventional teaching; we had an invited speaker on community action and the university in the afternoon, and a video film on learning followed by a party in the evening; the final day started with open air activities, such as gardening, a walk, ballgames or discussions on the grass, and an afternoon in small groups working out what we wanted to do together during the term.

Members of the steering group had prepared several possible projects and these were used by most people as the basis of their own work. The aim of the projects was to tackle real problems requiring solution as a means of acquiring skills, ideas and information. We decided the projects should arise out of felt needs, each project should be developed by the small group taking it on rather than outsiders, use resources attuned to our environment, and be relevant to ourselves and others. Arriving at a suitable project was therefore an important process which sometimes took all term, but once started some continued several years. Examples of projects are an examination of the ideological basis of a first year ecology course which culminated in the production of a critical sources guide; setting up a network of learning exchanges in the town; setting up a street library; producing a series of radio and video programmes critical of university education for the campus radio and television services.

The term ended with a discussion of how the course had gone for everyone involved and the election of a steering group for the following term's counter course; many of the projects, of course, continued autonomously."



While you are doing a counter course, set one for your tutors: give them a text and a task and a term to finish it in - for example:

The Student Trap, A Critique of University and Sixth Form Curricula, by John Hajnal, Pelican Books, 1972, argues in great detail that English Sixth Form and University education is the worst of any industrial country, and that degrees are badges of status with limited value as an educational qualification.

Task: Draw up a list of reforms for this university on the basis of the insights of this book.

Teaching As A Subversive Activity, by Neil Postman & Charles Weingartner, Penguin Education, 1971, is about teaching in such a way that pupils become better able to learn and tackle real problems in the world.

Task: Most university lecturers have neither the ability nor training to teach - give them this book and ask them to 1) write down what they think is worth learning in the form of questions; 2) re-evaluate their own work and methods; 3) re-design their syllabus as a path to learning rather than a programme of instruction.

Education and Jobs, The Great Training Robbery, by Prof. Ivar Berg, Penguin Education, 1973, shows that much American higher education does little for those taking it in terms of real training while consigning large numbers of young people to a social limbo defined by low-skill no-opportunity jobs; he argues that educational investment should be redirected into primary and secondary education.

Research Task: Can a similar case be made for British universities?

Action Task: Convert your subject to a more socially useful purpose than teaching at university.

II STUDENT UNIONISM

However successful and well supported your alternative education projects become, they are unlikely to produce any direct changes in the university unless you have support within the superstructure or the numbers of students refusing to take courses or exams in favour of student-run alternatives seriously threatens its credibility.

For the most part, student representation on committees is irrelevant and can achieve very little by its very nature - students' comparative inexperience in a minority position against faculty expertise, manipulation, informal contacts and built-in majority backed by higher authorities who will reverse or water down proposals anyway and institutional inertia - yet a seat inside can be useful, if only to keep an eye on what they are up to and know who's who in fantasy land, and to voice a student opinion or sound a note of dissention. Much greater use of formal representation can be made, however, if it is backed by members of faculty, the students' union and, most important of all, informed discussion among students in general.

Like the general public, many faculty members and non-academic staff believe that if students are not stuck behind desks swatting they are wasting tax-payers money skiving: its up to you to show that is not true. People outside universities find it hard to believe that standards of teaching are appalling, that most courses are irrelevant to real concerns in the world, that much of what passes for education is sheer self-indulgence, that degrees are badges of status not excellence, that the ivory tower is merely feather bedding - it has to be explained every time you take action over your own learning.

Use the university media, especially those read by staff, and contact their trade union branches explaining your actions and offering to talk with them. With more contentious actions, like a counter-course or a campaign, it is also worth contacting the local press, although beware of doing so prematurely.

Sympathetic faculty can also be directly involved in student seminars, study groups counter activities or campaigns, although if they show interest but do not become directly involved, continue to keep them informed: they may turn out to be decisive allies at crucial moments.

Involvement in the student media, union organisation and other internal forums may be particularly important in spreading awareness and gaining support for action in education among students in general - as well as a way of learning a great deal about communication, organisation, decision-making, practical politics and trade unionism. However, involvement in the university or union structure is always more effective if it is an expression of local level action:

caught up in the internal dramas of the union, remote from the membership, it is easy to loose touch. Many universities and unions lack intermediate forms of discussion and decision-making which involve all students at the Course, Subject, Departmental or School level. Creating the appropriate organisation to formulate student policy can then be more important than becoming stuck in the existing structure. Use the existing structure only when essential and you cannot act on your own or as a small group, and then only when you have the experience through working in local level groups. If you must use the existing structure to take up a grievance or implement a proposal, try to create a support group which is able to share the work load. Committee representatives can then prepare for each meeting with others and then report back afterwards.

Much more than information, a committee member will learn the practical knowledge of how to work with power and authority: in a support group, the elected officer will also have a dominant position merely by virtue of his or her inside information and experience, so the task of the group, collectively is to learn how to use that power. The officer will want to be most effective inside the structure while the group wants to work out their policy and tactics, which creates conflict. The officer, who has to speak firmly and authoritatively on university committees, has to be silent and listen in the support group, or speak softly and simply describe what faculty think they are doing; the others should handle the business of the meeting, rotating functions such as taking notes, chairing etc: beware of investing too many functions in one person.

When campaigning through a subject group or the student union, work strategically and prepare the group before you go; contact and communication has already been mentioned - the following could also help:

- If your main goal is fairly long term, choose achievable intermediate goals with which people can identify;
- build support among like-minded people; whatever your proposals, they will have been anticipated by others, who should be acknowledged and involved as much as possible;
- know who will be affected directly or indirectly by the changes proposed and involve them.
- know what you are doing and why and what direct or indirect affects it will have or people might think it will have and take them into account.
- make sure influential and respected people both inside and outside the university, either support your proposals or at least respect your motives.

Ideally, grievances, issues or new proposals should be tackled by negotiation, but most universities decision-making processes are so obscure, convoluted and hesitant that even the smallest innovation or complaint is smothered until it becomes a festering sore: academics are just not used to taking real decisions.

In these circumstances, appropriate and carefully calculated direct action can be much more effective, if you have prepared your ground before hand:

- ▶ Make the tactic fit the target: information leaks, bugging etc., are suitable for attacking secrecy; group work for attacking individualism and competition; bringing children into a lecture or library for a lack of childrens facilities etc. etc.,
- ▶ Be clear about the effect of any direct action proposed: for a committee of inquiry, are there enough students and sympathetic staff on it, will its reports be implemented? for direct action, who will be won over and who will be alienated?
- ▶ Never go outside your own experience as a group, particularly when attacking the opposition's own ground, unless you are sure of gaining from it.
- ▶ Go outside the opposition's experience whenever possible, do not do what is expected this will cause confusion, fear and retreat or over-reaction (see following).
- ▶ Make the opposition live up to its own rules and their projected image, and make sure the public knows when they do not: irrational or illogical actions by the authorities such as banning specific literature or speakers, suppressing a student seminar, calling in the police against student or staff etc., can all be very embarrassing - unless you have alienated the public first.
- ▶ Ridicule and embarrassment are potent weapons, if your target is right.
- ▶ A good tactic is one that people enjoy, one that goes on too long is a drag: people can usually keep an active interest in an issue for only so long.
- ▶ Keep the pressure on until you produce a reaction then change tactics to keep up the pressure; let the opposition escalate its reactions but keep open the option of letting them back down gracefully.
- ▶ The threat is usually more frightening than the thing itself: power is not only what you have, but what the opposition thinks you have - but beware of letting them call your bluff.
- ▶ The price of a successful attack is a constructive alternative; it must be worked out and be well publicised, and ready to adopt without loss of face.

If you are caught in a direct confrontation pick a target, freeze it, personalise it and polarise it: the opposition will try to pass the buck so pick on a suitable place for it to stop - disregarding "Why pick on me" remarks - and hammer it: it must be one person, not a system or committee but the chairperson or vice-chancellor or a leader of the most vocal faction of the opposition - isolate him from the rest until he gives in or is sacrificed by his own colleagues.

Finally, when campaigning on student issues beware of myopia or becoming shock troops for the Committee of Vice-Chancellor's defence of privilege, and so not neglect issues concerning other university unions or the local community.

Make the TACTIC fit the TARGET:

Against Classification & Exams

Targets: secrecy, grading, individualism, competitive-ness, discrepancy of results, lack of academic validity, lack of predictive value, archaic ritual, social injustice.

Possible Tactics:

Get and publish exam papers before the exam; failing that, make up the most likely questions using past papers and publish them as if they were the paper: you may just be right!

Organise a "swap your exam number" campaign to put each other's exam number on your scripts; or get people to put exactly the same number on their script.

Get people to put their own or someone else's name on their exam script, thus foiling secrecy.

Drive a flock of sheep into the exam room (call the RSPCA).

Take a copy of every exam paper handed in and get them marked by several acknowledged experts; use any discrepancies in results to discredit the examiners.

Get everyone to challenge their result issued by the university.

Get sympathetic examiners to leak confidential marking or classification procedures.

Instead of revising the subject, review the academic research on examinations and write an essay on that instead of answering questions on the exam paper.

Write an exam paper on the academic research on exams for all examiners to sit.

Boycott the exam in favour of a more demonstrably useful application of the subject or a properly organised collective exam or a portfolio campaign.

Boycott all courses but take the exam.

Publish comparisons between the academic qualifications and actual achievements of members of the university Court, local worthies, Fellows of the Royal Society, etc.

Persuade people offered honorary degrees by the university to turn them down in support of your campaign.

Organise a total boycott of the degree ceremony.

Organise a mock degree ceremony in a shopping centre, giving properly printed degree certificates to members of the public prepared to do certain things (answer University Challenge-type questions/sit at a desk for an hour/wear a gown and mortar board, etc. as appropriate).

At all times, use the local press to communicate with the university authorities: get public opinion on your side.



Cops on campus show the authoritarian fist behind the liberal facade - and academics are easily panicked!

IV. Beyond University

The monopoly of schools, colleges and universities over learning, resources and qualifications effectively disqualifies almost everything read, seen and experienced from education. Anyone truly concerned with learning, with using knowledge to deal with the world, will want to open higher education to more people and increase access to information throughout society.

A major obstacle to increasing access to education is that people outside the system usually do not know what is available and have no opportunity to express their needs within the education system. Until people outside higher education learn to make demands on it—for resources, instruction, supervision, time or anything else necessary for independent learning—insiders (students, faculty, staff) have a radical responsibility to enable them to do so.

Opening the Ivory Gates

Ending the university's lofty isolation within the education system alone is a slow, piecemeal process, but there are many ways in which it could be done. For example, universities have an overwhelming influence on secondary schools, directly through graduate teachers, representation on school and exam boards, and validation of external degrees; or indirectly through university entry as criteria of educational success. These points of contact and influence are used to maintain university interests, but not to give people a voice in the education resources provided by the state.

These areas offer no glamour or instant result but are important for opening university resources to the less privileged parts of the education system:

- Contact local branches of the National Union of School Students and offer support from student union resources;
- Visit local sixth forms to talk about university life (many heads welcome this), if possible bringing copies of your alternative prospectus or a specially prepared sheet and guide to its resources;
- Ask the local education authority for a nominee on the board of local schools and colleges with A-level pupils. Get one or more local councillors and existing board members to support the request (the local Labour Party or Trades Council should be able to suggest sympathetic members to approach). A student member would be able to listen, ask questions and understand the schools problems; to make the university aware of these problems, and to release resources wherever possible, and to increase schools' awareness of university realities.



- Encourage more enlightened faculty members to take an interest in local schools, school examination boards, external assessment of local colleges and university entrance procedures.
- Involve students in university admissions procedures by meeting interviewees and showing them round; campaign for mature students/early leavers schemes; produce additional publicity for existing mature-entry schemes to increase demand; work with local adult education centres and colleges from which students could also begin to use university resources or apply for mature entry; seek student representation on admissions panels, etc.
- Contact local unions, community centres, adult education centres, etc., to find out their need for information, in-service training, short or long courses and other resources which the university could provide.

Adult education, including adult literacy, offers many opportunities to work outside university in response to community demand and, like liberal arts courses in technical colleges or day release, their potential is far greater than usually recognised. The current limitations of adult education reflect its low status, inadequate resources and the local authorities who run a large part of it.

The Workers' Education Association (WEA) is also the most democratic of all educational organisations in the country. Every student is automatically a member with the right to vote at branch meetings, thus select courses and tutors for each term. The WEA also has a special commitment to industrial and community studies, involving trades unions and community groups in the organisation of courses on local needs and issues according to demand.

What's Worth Learning ECONOMICS

In 1975 the British Gross National Product was £92,841m, about £1,660 per person (the Third World Average is £220)
 *How is this income produced and distributed?
 In 1976 the richest 1% of Britons owned a quarter of all wealth in the country (compared with 61% in 1923) and the richest 10% owned 60%; 5% own 73% of all land.

*What is the social effect of this unequal distribution?

Distribution of wealth between nations is even more unequal (and increasingly so: see graph): in 1975 the poorest 60% of the world's population had only 9% of its G.N.P. while the richest 20% had over two thirds. Over the last 20 years Third World exports increased 30% yet received only 5% more cash due to slumps in commodity prices.

What is the wealth for the different regions?

[Comparative wealth]

GNP per person in dollars - after allowing for inflation



*Who are the terrorists - international commodity merchants or national liberation fighters?

Unemployment in the West is growing, and will increase even faster under a combination of monetarist policies and new technology; what hope have the 300 million unemployed or scratching a subsistence in the Third World?
 *Will the way you study continue this economic system - or will it help you contribute to a new one?

COMMUNITY COMMITMENT

University members can make a practical commitment to the communities in which they live in many ways, but the first step is to become a resident rather than a termly visitor - someone who lives locally, is part of the community first and a member of the University second, whose commitment to the area goes beyond the degree (if jobs are available). Become a member of local groups in preference to student ones and decide on priorities for action within the university according to the needs of people outside it.

Such decisions can only be made on the basis of direct involvement, such as:

- Trade union advice and information, in conjunction with the Trades Council, researching into local firms as the Sussex Conference of Socialist Economists did when a local cash register firm was taken over by a multi-national company or as university and poly staff throughout the country are doing for the Lucas Shop Stewards Combine Committee; working with local Work Hazards Groups, etc. With sufficient activity, faculty support and careful negotiation it might even be possible to set up a university - or foundation-funded advice and resource centre for trades unions, in Leeds.
- Welfare rights and legal advice for people who cannot afford solicitors, particularly for social security, housing and employment problems, either through a prominently placed legal advice and information desk or a law centre.
- Community resource centres, providing printing, duplicating, transport information and other support to community groups, if necessary using university resources to do so.
- Urban study centres to provide support for community involvement in planning, housing, economic development and other urban problems.
- Some alternative education projects suggested for students earlier in this pamphlet could also be started on a community basis. For example, a street library, as originally intended, could be just that - a room on a street, in a private house, community centre, laundrette or pub, used by neighbours to pool their books and papers; tool or toy libraries could also be launched on similar lines; a radically alternative prospectus for the area could be produced, covering all resources for independent learning locally, including availability of grants, etc.

What's Worth Learning

Alternative Work

"Free enterprise" is very good at producing anything, however useless, for which people will pay; it can do little about things which do not have a market price, such as the quality of life, neighbourhood care, the environment; and it is very bad at meeting needs of people who do not have enough money - thus the developing world, the elderly, children, disabled, sick or unemployed bear the burden of free enterprise.

*Could society be run on better principles?



*Have you or could you acquire skills really needed by Third World countries? Contact: Voluntary Service Overseas, World Development Movement or Third World First.

*Is there a local community project, co-operative or collective with whom you could work? - Get Ways & Means, In The Making Directory of Co-operative Projects, and alternative papers such as Undercurrents, Peace News,...

*What major local needs are not being met - housing? heating/energy conservation for pensioners? waste recycling? wholefoods? community printing? cycle repair? - Could these be provided in a co-operative, non-exploitative way? How could funds be raised? Who can help?

*Could you live on social security and work unpaid for a community project?

*What opportunities are there for changing the organisation and control of businesses from within - see Ken Coates's The Right to Socially Useful Work (Spokesman)

Alternative work is not a substitute for political activity

CONCLUSION

Learning does not just happen in a classroom, tutorial or lecture, but everywhere you make it happen. Our generation cannot afford to be doped by education into believing everything is more or less alright as it is: look at the poverty in most Third World countries, and the wealth in our own, an increasing gap as we buy their natural resources cheap and sell our goods, technology and services dear; look at the natural resources of energy, minerals, people etc., squandered by the West; look at our over-eating and the world's under-nourishment; look at the arms race, just as lethal under the controlled escalation of SALT II; look at the vast differences of income and wealth between different people in our own society.

Even if you are going to university to study something safe like Engineering, English Literature, Mathematics, Art History, questions like this are relevant to you, because your verbal fluency or technical ability will be used by those who hire you to administer, propagate or reproduce the world along its present path; your employers will require you to solve problems without asking questions about the purpose or effect of the solutions you provide: by going through university without questioning it at every step you are becoming part of these problems.

I hope this pamphlet has suggested some of the means of discovering some of the solutions while at university - by challenging what you are told, by working as a group, by becoming involved in local communities, fragmented as they are; by creating alternatives; by producing changes in yourself and the university.

You are not alone - join up with others around you and it is surprising what you can achieve together.

DONT GO TO UNIVERSITY UNLESS YOU HAVE

- **SUPPORTED YOURSELF FOR SEVERAL YEARS
- **EXPERIENCE OF MANUAL WORK
- **WORKED WITH A COMMUNITY PROJECT
- **TRAVELLED IN BRITAIN OR ABROAD
- **EXPERIENCE OF TEACHING OTHERS
- **DONE SOME INDEPENDENT LEARNING
- **READ THIS PAMPHLET!!!

You do not need a grant - nor a career, in mind.